

Preparations for the Manchurian Strategic Offensive

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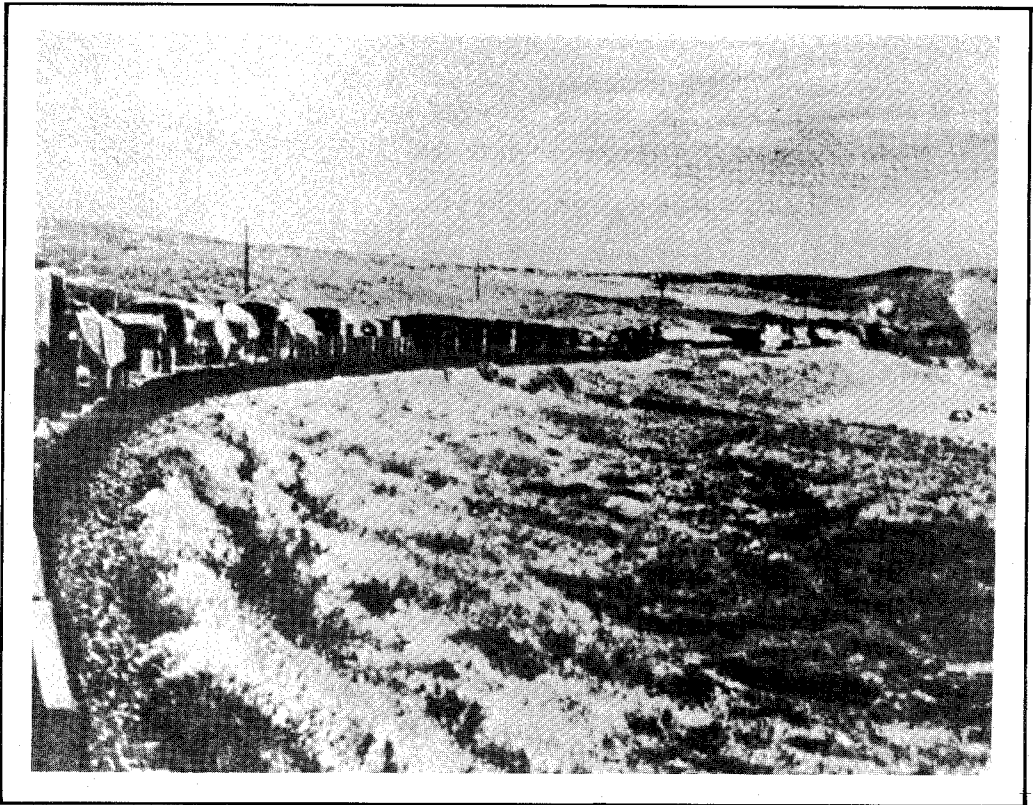


Soviet planning for the Manchurian campaign began in March 1945, when operations in the west were in their final phase. Shifting of men, materiel, and equipment to the Far East began in April 1945. In general, the Soviets transferred combat units and their equipment separately. Thus, at first they stockpiled equipment in the Far East and reequipped units already located in that region.¹

Massive regrouping of forces to the east occurred from May through July of 1945, with units still arriving when the campaign opened in August. To provide command and control for the expanded forces, the Soviet High Command shifted experienced headquarters staffs from eastern Europe to the Far East and Trans-Baikal areas. Two front headquarters (the Karelian Front and 2d Ukrainian Front) and four army headquarters (5th, 39th, 53d, and 6th Guards Tank) provided this leavening of combat experience. The 39th and 5th Armies moved from the Königsberg area in East Prussia; the 6th Guards Tank Army and 53d Army, from the Prague region.² The High Command decided to move those units whose past experience suited them to the peculiarities of planned operations. Thus, the 39th Army, experienced in fighting for the heavily fortified area of Königsberg, would deploy to attack the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region of Manchuria. The 5th Army, also engaged in reducing Königsberg, would conduct attacks in the heavily fortified Japanese defensive zone in eastern Manchuria. The 6th Guards Tank Army, fresh from fighting its way through the Carpathian Mountains, would traverse the Grand Khingan Mountains of western Manchuria. The 53d Army, also experienced in the Carpathian campaign, would engage Japanese forces in the mountains of western Manchuria.

In addition to these major headquarters, the High Command shifted many separate tank, artillery, and engineer units eastward to provide the support necessary for operations in the varied terrain of Manchuria. Redeployment of forces had the cumulative effect of doubling the strength of Soviet forces in the Far East from forty to more than eighty divisions.³ The volume of rail traffic involved in the move best illustrates the complexity and magnitude of the redeployment. For the 9,000- to 12,000-kilometer move, the Soviets used 136,000 rail cars. In June and July of 1945,

twenty-two to thirty trains used the Trans-Siberian railroad each day.⁴ Units also made extensive use of roads to reach final deployment areas. For example, the Trans-Baikal Front* deployed from the main line of the Trans-Siberian railroad to Choibalsan, Mongolia, a distance of some 500 to 600 kilometers, by both rail and road. Extensive redeployment also took place among units already within the Far East and Trans-Baikal region. From May to June 1945, thirty divisions moved to new locations, a shift involving about one million men.⁵



Trains moving east along the Trans-Siberian Railroad

The High Command also transferred to the Far East selected new commanders to organize and lead Soviet forces in the campaign. Again, experience and performance were primary criteria for selection. Two front commanders, Marshals R. Ya. Malinovsky and K. A. Meretskov, two front chiefs of staff, Generals M. V. Zakharov and A. N. Krutikov, and four army

*A front is equivalent to an army group.

commanders, Generals A. P. Beloborodov, I. M. Chistyakov, N. D. Zakhvatayev, and A. A. Luchinsky, received postings to the Far East. General I. A. Pliyev received command of the joint Soviet-Mongolian Cavalry-Mechanized Group.⁶ Most of these commanders either had experience in the region or were associated with major headquarters that moved east. In June 1945, Marshal A. M. Vasilevsky became coordinator of overall operations in the Far East and Trans-Baikal regions. Vasilevsky's major qualification for the position was excellent service as representative of the *STAVKA* (headquarters of the Supreme High Command) and as coordinator of major successful operations in the west. It soon became apparent, however, that the scope of operations in Manchuria was too great for mere coordination. Consequently, on 30 July 1945 the Soviets created the Far East Command under Vasilevsky, backed by a full staff.⁷ In effect the Far East Command was a full-fledged theater of military operations* headquarters, the first of its kind in the Soviet World War II command experience.**



Commander of Soviet forces in the Far East, Marshal A. M. Vasilevsky

**teatr voennykh deistvii*: TVD.

**The Soviets had unsuccessfully experimented with a theater command structure in the summer of 1941 when German forces thrust into the Soviet Union.

The movement of men and materiel eastward involved constant use of screening, cover, and secrecy. The Soviets relied heavily on night movement to deceive the Japanese as to the grand scale of redeployment. Use of assembly areas remote from the border masked attack intentions, but ultimately required units to move to the attack in August over a considerable distance. Many high ranking commanders moved into the theater under assumed names and wearing the rank of junior officers.⁸ While the sheer size of Soviet movements made them impossible to mask, deceptive measures obscured the scale of Soviet redeployments and caused the Japanese to underestimate the Soviet ability to attack. Most Japanese believed that the Soviets would be able to launch an attack only in the fall of 1945 or in the spring of 1946. Few saw August as a possibility. By 25 July, Soviet force deployments to the Far East were virtually complete. The Soviets had only to set the date to start the operations.